

Reflections on 'Hidden Art'

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Jo Foord examines the notion of the creative city in terms of the potential it offers for new ways of living and working

In his collection of speeches *Creative Britain*, published at the end of 1998, Chris Smith (currently Minister for Media, Culture and Sport) lists what he expects of culture and creativity (1998, pp139-140). He writes:

... I feel so strongly that any cross-governmental attack on poverty and social exclusion has to include within it the enormous potential that cultural activity and innovation have to help get a regenerative process off the ground. In terms of what it can mean to individuals in their own lives and morale, what it can mean to neighbourhoods and cities, what it can mean for jobs and a local economy, and what it can mean for the sense of self-worth of an entire area, we cannot and must not ignore the way in which culture can give a lead.

So, much has come to be expected of creativity and culture in cities today. Culture is supposed to overcome social exclusion and poverty by empowering individuals and neighbourhoods and by democratising and enlivening urban ways of living. Creativity is held up as a means of generating new ideas, new solutions and new ways of working on seemingly intractable social problems. Yet, despite this, the bottom line is that together culture and creativity are supposed to foster economic growth. It is a tall order.

Furthermore, this economic growth has to take place in cities where the social composition is in a state of constant flux. Cities, and especially those like London which have a global reach, are now home to diverse populations with a multiplicity of languages and lifestyles, behaviours and aspirations. Difference is often more familiar than sameness. This 'rich mix' is the assumed favoured milieu of the 'creative city'. In their final report on the richness of cities, Demos and Comedia claim that individuals and

organisations, ranging from businesses to public authorities living and performing in today's urban environments, are more likely to succeed if they tap into cultural difference and make use of its opportunities creatively - that is by making new connections, getting rid of preconceptions and breaking existing rules. Thus, for them, the 'creative city' is one in which individuals and organisations can constructively 'engage through imaginative awareness of new environments and new conditions, anticipating change, rather than reluctantly responding to it' (Worpole and Greenhalgh 1999, p4). For others, such as the London First Centre and the Race for Opportunity Campaign, diversity and cultural difference imply economic assets both in terms of the large pool of language and cultural skills in the labour force and the opportunities for niche marketing of goods and services (*Financial Times* 29/3/99). These suggestions that diversity is productive and that it is possible to be ahead of change within cities, rather than existing in its wake, have proven attractive to an influential group of policy analysts.¹ For them cultural activity and creativity suggest important means of producing imaginative, inclusive, sustainable urban regeneration. Drawing on interpretations of the organisational forms, production processes and potential outcomes of the arts and the creative industries, this lobby also suggests that, where applied in areas needing economic renewal, the 'creative city' approach can produce results relatively cheaply (Landry et al 1996). Again expectations are high.

This article sets out to examine this seductive notion of the 'creative city'. In particular it focuses on the interface between cultural creativity and economic regeneration. The 'creative city' is not exclusively concerned with economic regeneration. Some of its protagonists have much to say about personal, community and political empowerment (Landry et al 1996). However, the original argument for a 'creative city' prioritises the synthesis of economic potential and a creative culture in cities (Landry and Bianchini 1995). In this the authors are responding to criticisms of existing culture-led economic regeneration strategies. The marketing and consumption of culture, from the arts to heritage and landscape, propel many of these existing strategies to popular cultural activities. They tend to stress short term economic return. Yet, it has been widely suggested that this return is not proven, is unsustainable and costly, given the often high levels of public investment (Bassett 1993; Griffiths 1998; Hall and Hubbard 1996; Kearns and Philo 1993). Instead, the authors of the 'creative city' suggest that the full economic potential of culture is not solely to be found in its marketable products. Although these are important, they suggest that the creativity embodied in cultural activity produces a living reservoir of skills, knowledge, talent and ideas. It is this pool of human resources which potentially offers

new ways of working and living, fresh attitudes to economic problems and the mobilisation of rich multicultural urban diversity. New economic activities, including the 'discovery' of products and services, emerge from tapping this reservoir and multicultural diversity. The economic potential of the 'creative city' is, therefore, process led rather than output driven (Landry and Bianchini 1995; Landry et al 1996; Greenhalgh et al 1997).

In essence, the 'creative city' fixes upon two key points: first, the reservoir of skills, knowledge, talent and ideas and the processes by which these can be harnessed for local economic development. Second, it fixes upon the role of multicultural urban diversity as a facilitator of creative thinking and cultural innovation in the local economy. This article therefore explores these two aspects of the 'creative city'.

It offers three inter-related observations on the practical implementation of a creative approach to local economic regeneration in cities. First it argues that this approach fails to identify the role and significance of a particular group of local key actors: the 'new cultural intermediaries'. This group of actors is integral to the identification of the reservoir of skills, knowledge, talent and ideas and their key role is to interpret the meaning of cultural activity and to ascribe symbolic value. Second, it is suggested that in failing to recognise this key group of actors, the creative approach misses their pivotal position in devising how culture is harnessed for local economic development. It misses how these new cultural intermediaries operate as 'economic interpreters' who promote 'economic normalisation'. That is, how they identify existing and potential markets for creative ideas or products, spread knowledge of these amongst cultural producers, and facilitate producers' acquisition of business skills, attitudes and organisational structures. Cultural producers are therefore increasingly encouraged to act within the norms of business and enterprise, a consequence of which is that they risk impoverishing the very creativity upon which they depend. Third, the article argues that in mobilising culture for economic regeneration in this way, these new local cultural intermediaries are selective in their cultural choices and this, somewhat paradoxically, serves to neutralise the diversity and rich mix on which the creative approach to city economies is based. In short, it is argued that the 'creative city' is not able to deliver Smith's expectations without creative and cultural costs.

The article begins by reviewing existing claims for the urban economic potential of culture. It then briefly outlines the arguments which underpin the 'creative city' and makes the case for the role of new cultural intermediaries in mobilising culture for economic regeneration. The arguments developed here are then elaborated further by drawing from on-going research into the

practices surrounding ‘cultural production’ in Hackney and, in particular, on an interpretation of the practices and experiences of participants and facilitators in one local initiative, Hidden Art.²

Culture, culture everywhere

Increasingly it has been asserted that it is culture which makes city *economies* possible (Zukin 1991, 1995). Structural shifts in advanced economies now prioritise the knowledge and design content of goods and services (Lash and Urry 1994) and the performance element of consumption (Crang 1994). These new trends reflect and fuel the intensification of a symbolic economy in which exchange is infused by trade in cultural value. It is argued that the increasing significance of culture in the products and practices of economies has stimulated a new role for cities: they have become the locale and raw material for the symbolic economy. Trade in cultural value, through the arts, food, fashion, music, urban lifestyles and urban tourism, is now central to city economies. Zukin (1998, p826) writes:

The symbolic economy is based on the inter-related production of such cultural symbols [as these] and the spaces in which they are created and consumed - including offices, housing, restaurants, museums and even the streets. Thus urban lifestyles are not only the result but also the raw materials of the symbolic economy’s growth.

Capitalising on cultural assets has therefore become an important way of engaging new economic activity for cities, especially those devastated by de-industrialisation (Bianchini and Parkinson 1993; Zukin 1995). This association between culture and economy rapidly transformed urban culture into the ‘enterprise of cultures’. Hewison (1995), commenting on post-war cultural policy in Britain, notes that in a nation where the general perception is one of economic uncertainty, economic activity has become the primary means of public expression and social inclusion. The consequence for culture is that it too has become defined by the economic (p310):

Cultural engagement is conceived of as cultural consumption, and indeed culture is seen more and more as a commodity like any other. The market place has become the model of culture, through the operation of the enterprise culture, the long front of culture has become a supermarket of styles.

Thus the singularity of the enterprise culture has recast urban culture as

consumption. Indeed the city itself has become a commodity to be consumed in the search for the 'obscure object of desire that is called urbanity' (Robins 1993).

So, for more than a decade the economic potential of cultural activity has been vigorously promoted. This has taken different forms. For some time now the role of the commercial cultural industries has been highlighted (GLC 1985; GLEB 1985; Cultural Industries Task Force 1998). It is noted that these industries, especially those associated with the performance, reproduction and distribution of popular cultural forms (for example popular music, musical theatre, film, video, TV) create jobs and have significant economic growth potential. Currently the creative and cultural industries in Britain generate, allegedly, £60bn in revenues and employ 1.5 million people (Cultural Industries Task Force, 1998). Such claims for jobs and revenues are frequently reproduced at the local level (Comedia 1997). Furthermore these sectors play on an international stage and it is suggested that with more recognition and investment they could contribute significantly to Britain's global economic aspirations.

Likewise, the idea has been advanced throughout the 1990s of the economic potential of mainstream professional arts institutions and activities. Through auditing audiences and consumer spending it has been suggested that there are growing markets for the arts and related leisure activities. Despite the growth in home entertainment, the markets for theatre, dance, opera, classical music and heritage, including museums, was perceived to be underdeveloped - as was their potential to increase their own revenues. Again, with recognition and investment the returns were implied to be potentially significant (Myerscough 1988). Subsequently such claims have been shown to be over-inflated (Hughes 1989). Evans (1999) has demonstrated that whilst both ticket prices and government subsidy have generally increased for the major subsidised public arts companies in England, audiences have either remained static or, in some cases, fallen significantly. Indeed Casey et al (1996, p xviii) have redefined this sector as the 'supported cultural sector', acknowledging that 'their production at a socially optimal level cannot be wholly ensured by the market'. A mix of public and private sponsorship is therefore advocated alongside key enterprise activities, including special events, money-making exhibitions, direct marketing, hospitality and retail developments. Nevertheless, the switch has been made from a culture of public subsidy to one of supplementary enterprise and private sector sponsorship.

Yet perhaps the most important way in which the economic potential

of culture has been realised is through changes in consumption. There has been both an increase in the consumption of culture (artefacts, events) and in consumption as an everyday cultural practice (Featherstone 1991; Miller 1995; Mort 1996). Everyday urban culture is steeped in the practices of both the consumption of food and everyday objects which have cultural value attached to them. High value mass market retailing of food, fashion and the leisure experience of shopping has been linked to specific, 'spectacular' urban landscapes, including the out-of-town shopping 'mall' and the down-town arcade (Goss 1993; Shields 1991; Zukin 1995). In addition, niche retailing in central city 'cultural' or 'ethnic' or 'pink' quarters (Brown 1998; Mort 1998) plays on the consumption of particular cultural practices of minority lifestyles (O'Conner 1998). For many commentators consumption is no longer a privileged addendum of production based social class status. Consumption has become the aggressive pursuit of cultural capital and it is cultural capital which increasingly forms the basis of both class distinction (Bourdieu 1984; 1993) and social group identity (Featherstone 1991).

It is perhaps not surprising that urban regeneration strategies have latched onto these potentials for local economic enhancement. The arts, and more recently popular culture, have been mobilised as key factors in the packaging and re-imaging of places, especially urban places in need of inward economic investment. Key, here, are the re-workings of local identities to erase images of inappropriate urban cultures by replacing them with cultural boosterism (Griffiths 1998). The place-marketing literature of many cities and towns more often than not lays claim to an established cultural programme of music and the arts and/or to a vibrant colony of artists and designers whose (work)shops you can visit to indulge in hedonistic consumption, followed by a cappuccino or cafe *latte* in an adjoining coffee house (Bianchini and Parkinson 1993; Zukin 1995). Imaging culture (from artistic events and cultural objects through to historic landscapes and the 'buzz' associated with popular and/or youth culture) is now a well documented element of economic boosterist strategies (Hall and Hubbard 1996, 1998; Short and Kim 1998). Another familiar aspect of these strategies is the development of flagship property developments centred on arts and cultural venues with their associated tourist and shopping opportunities. Infrastructural investment in cultural quarters is also commonplace producing a mix of retail, housing, live/work space, restaurants and galleries (Coupland 1997). City managers keen to re-position, or, at the very least, maintain the position of their cities in European or global urban hierarchies have therefore adopted

the entrepreneurial promotion of these 'deliberately crafted images' (Griffiths 1998) to external audiences as well as to local people.

The results of such cultural consumption and property-led regeneration are widely held to be divisive. They are said to promote both elite urban enclaves with minority leisure interests and high expenditure based retailing (Crewe and Forster 1993; Sadler 1993) and urban areas dominated by overheating niche visitor economies (cf: McCarthy (1998) on Temple Bar, Dublin and Franks (1996) on Covent Garden, London). Both types of regeneration create jobs which are concentrated in low skilled, poorly paid sectors of the economy (Lowe and Crewe 1996).³

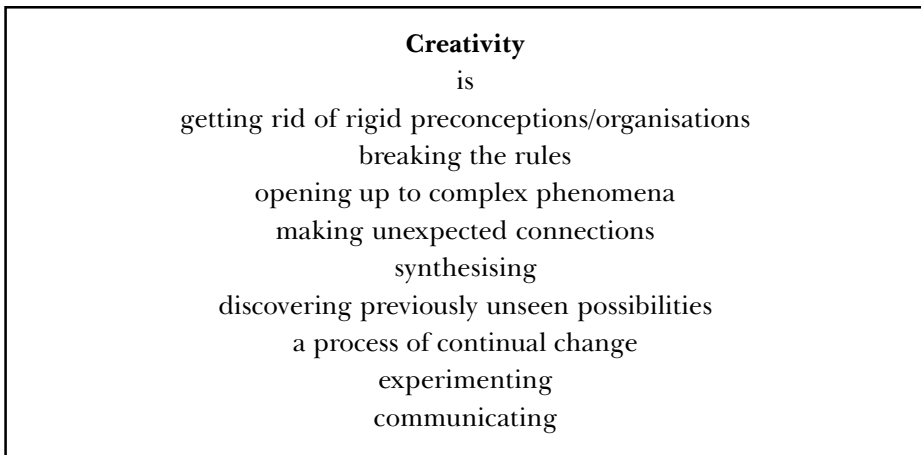
'Creative city'

The 'creative city' argument acknowledges these problems and attempts to present the economic potential of 'culture' in cities as dynamic and inclusive. The argument assumes that creativity has become more important to city economies and that nurturing it has become critical to economic success. The term, the 'creative city', burst into the regeneration and urban policy arena in the mid-1990s with the publication of a joint Demos/Comedia pamphlet, *The Creative City* (Landry and Bianchini 1995). This publication drew together discussion and debate from a variety of 'think tank' seminars and policy conferences. By returning to the practices of the arts and of cultural policy, these discussions had led to a fresh consideration of creativity as a process and as a way of thinking. The authors present vignettes of good practice in the arts and urban regeneration, many from western European cities, to support their arguments (Landry et al 1996).

Creativity is commonly associated with individual achievements which flow from intense moments of absorption in an event or task. The outcomes are original and represent advances in thinking, manipulation of materials or the application of techniques. Landry and Bianchini (1995) agree that creativity is 'a way of getting rid of rigid perceptions and of opening ourselves to complex phenomena' and that it includes the discovery of unforeseen possibilities which can be turned into opportunities: that is, opportunities to transform organisations into productive social entities or ideas into outputs. These interpretations emphasise 'the new, progress and continual change'. However, creativity in the 'creative city' is more than this: it is about being able to *synthesise* situations. To do this requires making connections and working across different spheres of expertise. Creative skills are 'soft skills' - they are those of the 'broker',

the 'fixer', the 'communicator', the 'networker'. Essentially creativity derives from *social interaction*, rather than individual isolation. The city is presented as the ideal context for creative thinking as it provides the dense milieu necessary for creative social interaction.

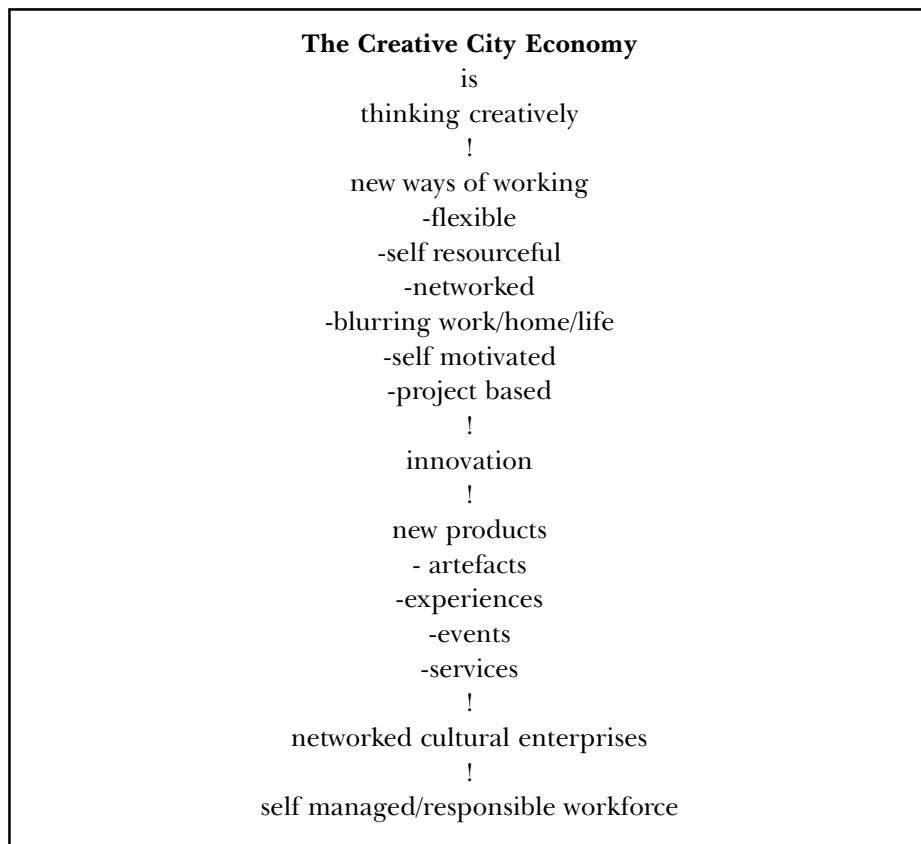
Figure 1: Creativity is ...



Adapted from Landry and Bianchini (1995)

Drawing from analyses of the creative process in the arts and cultural activities, the 'creative city' selectively borrows desirable practices to elaborate the process of working creatively. These include: *concentration on and dedication to a project; making work exciting, fun and energising; the ability to synthesise and think laterally across different media and areas; having flexible approaches to working time; demonstrating a willingness to learn and apply new skills; the ability to experiment; and a desire to work with others.* Creativity is presented as a process which emerges from combining these practices in the context of a particular project, event or activity. Yet, it is also noted that this creative process is of no significant value unless the ideas and the ways of working which it generates can be linked to 'innovation'. Innovation adds value by turning creativity into products thus opening up the potential for economic return. These products (including artefacts, events, experiences, performances and services) are then turned into commodities sold in the private sector or into social goods traded in the public sector. This transformation of creativity through innovation into saleable/tradeable products is highly dependent on the collective and creative social process of groups working together, within and between cultural enterprises, to maximise the economic potential.

Figure 2: *The creative city economy is ...*



Furthermore, in this 'creative city' the tensions between the destructive and creative tensions of urban processes, which preoccupied discourses of the modern city, have been recast as the dynamism which fuels the post-industrial context for new economic and social relations in cities (Berman 1982; Harvey 1989; Zukin 1991, 1995). De-industrialisation and derelict urban landscapes are not presented as problems but are re-thought as opportunities: they are recast as arenas in which 'new innovative, lateral and creative opportunities can emerge'. The disruption of 'old shared rhythms of life' based on the routines of the workshop, factory or the office, which de-industrialisation produced, are not lamented. Instead, their loss is seen as an opportunity to challenge 'inherited assumptions and ways of working'. So, the disruption (destruction) of regular working hours and regulated working conditions paves the way for the introduction (creation) of new work practices, attitudes, motivations and behaviours. These new work disciplines inspire self-regulated labour in a flexible labour market, where the (self-)employee takes on the responsibilities and risks

of employment in a climate of economic uncertainty.

Such 'opportunities', it is argued, provide the context for creative practices on which the industries of the twenty-first century will rely. Likewise, the release of urban land from the rigidities of mono-functional zoning frees up possibilities for more mixed and flexible economic and social use: the landscape of the creative milieu. It is suggested then, that the 'creative city' will materialise in such urban landscapes only when the rules and practices of past economies have been dismantled. It is also suggested that these creative milieux are place-specific - nodes of intense creative interaction within the general urban space economy.

This discovery of creativity as a social rather than individual phenomenon coincided with an emerging interpretation of cities. In this developing discussion it was suggested that cities, contrary to both longstanding policy and popular belief, are not wholly problematic places (Montgomery 1995; Rogers and Fisher 1992; Rogers and Gumuchdjian 1997; Demos/Comedia 1997-98; Urban Task Force 1998). This re-thinking of cities identified some urban areas, especially those which have global connections through migration and economic relations, as complex. They have a density, speed and flow of interactions between people and between institutions which positively enhances economic and social life. As such, it has been argued that cities provide the appropriate context for cultural experience, experimentation in cultural expression and exchange in cultural practices. Without the proximity and intensity of human interaction found within cities, especially between strangers, culture and creativity would be impoverished, underdeveloped (Sennett 1990, 1994). This intense urban context, it is claimed, fosters both multicultural strengthening of identity and intercultural exchange. Indeed it has been suggested that cities can only thrive when these defining characteristics are both recognised as cultural benefits and mobilised as economic assets (Amin and Graham 1997). These cities and urban areas have been constructed as the great creative melting pots of the future in which sharing a diverse array of social and cultural activities in the urban public domain is presented as the antidote to recurrent problems of urban blight and social exclusion. There is, then, a new mantra developing. Metropolitan living exposes people to multicultural urbanism and thus to new stimuli. The proximity and intensity of these experiences allow new intercultural connections to be made and the benefits are both social and economic (Greenhalgh et al 1998).⁴

Mobilising creativity and culture

The 'creative city' blueprint for economic regeneration has two requirements:

a reservoir of human potential with creative ways of working and a rich city milieu. Once in place nothing else seems to be required. However, what is missing from the 'creative city' thesis is any explication of the process of *mobilising* creativity and culture for economic regeneration. Reflecting on the analysis of cultural production offered by Bourdieu (1984, 1993) and extrapolating from early work by Zukin (1988), it is argued here that an analysis of the role of cultural intermediaries provides a useful explanation of the ways in which culture and creativity become incorporated within the economy.

'Cultural intermediaries' are interpreters, often intellectuals and educators, who play an active role in attaching cultural value to particular goods, especially cultural goods (music, literature, artwork) and in legitimating cultural activity (Bourdieu 1984). As Bourdieu has argued, culture implies the consumption of key cultural goods: that is the consumption of artefacts, experiences and events (created by cultural producers - writers, performers, artists) which have acquired symbolic meaning (prestige, approval, esteem). For Bourdieu this symbolic meaning is attached to cultural goods through the *knowledge* and *recognition* of cultural intermediaries. On the basis of their cultural capital, acquired from their social class backgrounds or habitus, they interpret and manipulate knowledge and therefore define the status of cultural goods.⁵ They add value to cultural goods by conferring, consecrating and legitimating their symbolic meaning with, and for, particular audiences or social groups. Acquisition of cultural capital is presented as the mode of social (class) distinction (Bourdieu 1984).

This reading implies that culture derives not from an individual instance of creativity but that it is constituted in a specific field of cultural production (for example of visual or performing arts, film, popular, folk or street music). The field of cultural production has its own structures and relations of power within which cultural intermediaries play a pivotal role. Only those who are in positions of power bestow symbolic meaning; that is it is bestowed by those with cultural capital (knowledge, mastery or expertise). The field of cultural production can become disrupted by challenges to the structures and relations of power within it, displacing intermediaries whose expertise/knowledge becomes marginal to hegemonic cultural tastes. The consolidation and legitimation of new cultural forms emerges through disputes between established cultural intermediaries and new cultural intermediaries over cultural value. This therefore disrupts existing cultural consensus and allows the symbolic authority of new intermediaries to emerge within the field of cultural production (cf: Hewison (1995) on this process in post war Britain).

An essential feature of these new cultural intermediaries is that they

adopt a 'learning mode'. Featherstone (1991) argues that this attitude enables them to reflect on identity, presentation, appearance, and lifestyle and to engage in a seemingly endless quest for new experiences. He suggests that they use these reflections to seek elaborate signifiers of distinction, poaching elements of others' lifestyles and cultural practices. They collude amongst themselves and with their audiences to legitimate new arenas of cultural activity. In his reading of Bourdieu, Nixon (1997) notes that these new intermediaries operate best in 'middle brow' culture: a mixture of popularised high culture and newly emergent cultural forms. He also notes that these new intermediaries reproduce this middle-brow culture by drawing on their own and their audiences' 'cultural goodwill': that is an ambition for understanding of both high and popular culture but one which is thwarted by a lack of detailed understanding of either. The result is a pick-n-mix of superficial knowledges of different cultural forms.

In her seminal text, *Loft Living*, Zukin identifies a central role for new cultural intermediaries in the transformation of urban space. She traces the changes in use and ownership of an area on the edge of New York's financial district. This area, subsequently renamed SoHo, is steadily converted from industrial quarter to gentrified residential district. At one level this transformation is presented as a conflict over the use of urban space. Pioneering visual artists, who had colonised small scale industrial premises, successfully defended their patch against the encroachment of the financial district and modernist redevelopment schemes only to be excluded themselves as a 'cleaned-up' and commodified version of their way of living/working was sold to high earners from the financial district, along with the now fully converted buildings. (A version of this narrative is retold in the context of London by Green (1999).)⁶

Yet at another level Zukin presents this socio-spatial transformation as a metamorphosis of the symbolic meaning of the city and the lifestyles of the visual artists. New meaning was derived from specifically urban cultural goods: in this case the nineteenth century industrial urban landscape, the live/work lifestyle of the artist, and the contemporary art itself. Zukin (1988) notes how a specific group of new cultural intermediaries were active in devising the images and selecting the cultural goods which symbolise a specifically metropolitan lifestyle. These interpreters, often self-appointed and working in the media, fashion and art market, drew their symbolic reference points as much from commercially produced everyday objects and popular culture as from legitimated 'high' cultural activities.

In a period of social dislocation there is increasing fluidity in the field of cultural production and in the choice and promotion of symbols by

intermediaries which define the distinction between social groups. During the transformation of SoHo symbolic meaning was being attached to authentic nineteenth-century urban industrial landscapes by groups who distinguished themselves by their knowledge and appreciation of its authenticity. Likewise, symbolic meanings were being negotiated in the field of cultural production for contemporary art, music and interior design. The visual artists contributed to this metamorphosis of symbolic meaning in their output, lifestyles and the increasing performance that was associated with exhibiting work in loft gallery settings. O'Conner (1998) has noted a similar role emerging for new cultural intermediaries in the reconstruction of central Manchester. Here the new intermediaries were familiar with the mores of popular music and club culture and were able to act as translators of cultural value for a local political audience during a period of wider social restructuring and shifting local identity. In this example, the significance of the new cultural intermediaries was their mobilisation of a specifically local cultural knowledge.

However, Zukin notes that once the visual arts and the loft lifestyle identified and projected by the new cultural intermediaries gained economic value, their form was altered and cultural value diminished. Once aestheticised both were commodified. In this process it was the 'realtors', property developers, who acted as economic interpreters recognising the economic potential of the loft lifestyle and tidying up the cultural landscape for the market. They produced and legitimated a cleaner image of loft living and pumped up its economic value. In this case the cultural intermediaries defined cultural value for the purposes of social distinction, yet it was the economic interpreters, the property developers, who redefined these cultural goods for the market.⁷

Creative Hackney

In Hackney the separation of cultural legitimation and economic valuation, as identified by Zukin, is not so clear-cut. So much so that the tasks of identifying and legitimating cultural value, and of interpreting this for economic advancement, has become more closely entwined. One of the much vaunted claims about contemporary Hackney is that it has become home and workshop to thousands of creative artists working in many different media and in innovative and challenging ways. Indeed, if one is to believe the press releases, Hackney is supposed to have the largest concentration of artists and designer-makers anywhere in Europe (*Guardian* 10.7.96; *Financial Times* 3.8.96). It is currently estimated that there are approximately 4500 people

working full time and 2500 working part time in the broadly defined 'creative industries' in Hackney (Focus 1998). These figures exclude self employed artists, musicians, actors, dancers, film and video freelancers, writers and craftspeople as well as those working in 'creative occupations' in other sectors of the economy. If these were to be included, employment estimates would increase considerable some commentators suggest by as much as 30 per cent (Comedia 1997). Hackney is also a 'rich mix' location. It has density, diversity, and exposure to multicultural experiences. Out of 80,250 households, 45 per cent have a head of household self-defined as from a minority ethnic group (Hackney Housing Needs Survey 1997). In addition it is an area where de-industrialisation has stripped out the conventions and expectations ('rigidities') of regularised employment. At least in some small pockets of the borough there are lively cafes, bars and a club scene, providing the essential 'buzz' (Attfield 1997). There are also several new opportunities to view and consume culture - at markets, open studio events, new shops and galleries, and at the new Geffrye Museum Design Centre. Hackney, it seems, has the prerequisites for the 'creative city': a reservoir of skill, knowledge and talent, the 'rich mix' within the context of the 'opportunity' of de-industrialisation.

Hackney's creativity is now being promoted by several local agencies.⁸ For them Hackney has a new optimistic identity, giving coherence and direction to an area of London more used to crisis, exclusion and isolation. Yet the reconstruction of Hackney's image has itself been a creative process. It required cutting across past reputations and disrupting expectations. Hackney is more usually construed as a problem, as the chaotic inner city of vice and social distress (Harrison 1983), as the 'city in ruins' in which culture is in danger of being destroyed (Wright 1992) or as administratively inadequate (Ofsted 1999). Indeed, in the 1980s, when other cities and neighbourhoods were marketing themselves on the basis of their strengths, Hackney chose to go for a strategy of tragic realism. Hackney campaigned for government funding as 'Britain's poorest borough'. This strategy may have reflected a miserable reality yet, as Ward (1998, p33) notes, Hackney's campaign was misplaced. He writes: 'it was predicated on the notion of city as victim (of economic restructuring and social change) and relied on shaming the central state into providing resources to alleviate its distress. It looked back to a period when considerations of local need and welfare were alone, primary determinants of central allocation of funds'. In the early 1980s this appeal to welfarism was no longer sufficient. At a time when competitive city strategies were beginning to emphasise the 'can do' factor, a demonstration of entrepreneurialism was required (Hall and Hubbard 1996, 1998). Hackney's 'can do' factor finally emerged in the 1990s, cutting across such long held

expectations. Since 1992 there has been a growing counter representation of Hackney as ‘the cultural workshop of London’.

It is argued here, however, that this specific designation as ‘the cultural workshop’ could only have emerged from the practices and ambitions of a group of new cultural intermediaries working both within Hackney and in the wider cultural establishment. These intermediaries operated initially from within arts management and the consultancy arena. Latterly, intermediaries working in and around the galleries, the museums sector, the design media and design retailing have played an increasingly important part. Their interpretations and recognition of cultural practices and products as well as their highly networked ways of working were necessary to the construction and promotion of the ‘cultural workshop’ idea. Through a number of regeneration initiatives some were also instrumental in its subsequent development. Critically, the interpretations of the intermediaries became fused with the agendas of those working in local regeneration agencies.⁹

In the early 1990s, when the association between the economic potential of culture and regeneration was being promoted vigorously within local authority and urban regeneration networks, the London Borough of Hackney commissioned a consortium of arts consultants to examine the role of the arts in local regeneration and economic development. Knowledge of a neighbouring borough’s support for an arts and culture strategy, as well as the appointment of new staff who risked working across rigid internal boundaries, proved vital in getting this work commissioned. The final consultancy report was formative and influential (ppArtnerships and Urban Cultures Ltd 1992). This report constructed the foundations of the ‘cultural workshop’. The consultants ‘storyed’ Hackney’s cultural assets and opportunities in a number of inter-related ways: their designation as ‘the cultural workshop’ emerged out of the combined narrative. In this report they noted that local artists and arts organisations had an *established reputation* within the professional and community arts sectors for creative collaboration, innovation, risk taking and for achievement. They suggested that there was a ‘can do’ enterprising reputation amongst a small number of well known arts organisations, working in both subsidised and non-subsidised production, which produced high quality and accessible work. Many of their staff, artists and performers were known by the consultants and perceived as confident and competent within the professional arts networks of London. Thus there was both recognition of their cultural practices in the performing and visual arts and legitimisation within the wider field of cultural production.

Hackney was constructed as a *location of choice* for musicians, as well as visual and decorative artists. Here cultural value was being ascribed to Hackney

as a place of interesting, quasi-bohemian residence, and creative work. Since the value of artists' lifestyles was already firmly established in metropolitan culture, the consultants were able to draw on this asset to assert a cultural value for Hackney *per se*. The relatively cheap rents and access to shared workspace were prioritised as a key element of so called artists' lifestyles thus reinforcing a mythology of an interesting and alternative way of living and working. This mythology also drew from an overplaying of the roles of ACME and SPACE in developing shared short-life residential and industrial sites as communal spaces in which this lifestyle was lived out.

Likewise the urban landscape was mobilised as part of the storying of Hackney as the cultural workshop: in particular, it was suggested that the urban infrastructure facilitated cultural production because of the abundant availability of potential rehearsal, production and studio spaces. Indeed they stressed the importance of the *past mixed residential-industrial urban landscape*. Unlike the larger scale warehouse blocks of SoHo which Zukin describes, Hackney's industrial architecture was made up of unused small domestic workshops tucked in behind and between late Victorian suburban streets. There were some larger industrial buildings but these did not dominate the landscape. The small industrial spaces were available in close proximity to cheap residential properties and were available on short term leases with low rents. However, in parallel with SoHo, the consultants claimed a 'knowing authenticity' for the late nineteenth century residential/industrial vernacular townscape.

Hackney's *small firm* economy also became a key element in the re-telling of Hackney. Hackney's economic structure is heavily dependent on small firms. In 1996, approximately 14,000 people, 20 per cent of all those working in Hackney, were employed in firms of less than 11 people, and 87 per cent of firms had less than 25 employees (Focus 1998). Conditions in small firms are often precarious with high rates of both 'births' and 'deaths'. The consultants, however, turned this problem into a virtue (opportunity) for cultural production. They suggested that artistic and design-led firms, producing small batches or commissions for the arts and decorative interiors markets would blend easily into this flexible economic structure.

Finally, the consultants constructed particular strengths within Hackney's arts and cultural activities. They fixed upon *design and visual arts* ostensibly because of the numbers engaged in these activities and their estimated turnovers of £150m and £15m per annum respectively. Music production, photography and publishing were also identified but particular emphasis was placed on the potential of design and visual arts-led activities. Once again these cultural practices were already recognised and had legitimacy

within the field of cultural production. Their creative processes were known and their aesthetic boundaries openly debated within the arts and design arenas. Recognition of such practices by the consultants was more likely than other cultural practices which exist on the edges of the different fields of (European) cultural production. Furthermore, given the prevailing culture of enterprise, the attractions of a specifically design and arts led local economy were high. The consultants' identification of these activities, over and above other forms of cultural production, reflected this priority to promote local development of the design and culture niche in local economies.

This storytelling initiated the representation of Hackney as the 'cultural workshop of London' with a unique position and reputation in the arts and design sectors. Unlike other projects in urban re-imaging, Hackney was not initially projected as a location for cultural consumption. Although the number of consumption sites and opportunities has rapidly increased over the last three years, Hackney was not, in the first half of the 1990s, a place to do much consuming of *this kind of culture*. More importantly the symbolic attachment was to *production*. This drew on the reputation of a group of conscientious, committed and skilled working artists and designer-makers, the small enterprise economy, a positive location and the mixed, compact urban industrial-residential landscape.

Policy officers and local politicians initially produced this active construction of Hackney's creativity for internal consumption. Its purpose was specific: to place arts and culture at the centre of regeneration. It therefore constructed a platform from which the underdeveloped, disorganised creative capacity could be harnessed for the short term purpose of gaining access to regeneration funds (first from City Challenge and subsequently from European Objective 2 funding) and the long term purpose of local economic regeneration.

Hidden Art

Hidden Art is an umbrella for several different organisational and promotional activities.¹⁰ This initiative has developed and diversified since 1994. It started out by bringing together local cultural producers and developing their awareness of each other and each other's work. Hidden Art now undertakes a major annual open studio event, delivers business training to cultural producers, and maintains a web-based information point and database. Its main target group of participants are designer-makers working in the decorative arts, fashion and furniture, although a significant number of visual

artists also take part.¹¹

Building on the 'cultural workshop' representation, individual new cultural intermediaries working in the arts consultancy and in the museums sector mobilised key cultural producers in the design and visual arts fields to propose a project which would audit local design-led cultural production and showcase the work of local designer-makers and artists as part of a City Challenge programme. The project bid was successful. Its success was solely due to the specific cultural knowledge of these intermediaries and their ability to access local networks within these areas of cultural production. These factors were further enhanced by the new cultural intermediaries' particular acumen in recognising the potential markets for designer products and their ability to translate this form of cultural production into an appropriately packaged proposal with economic regeneration outputs.

Subsequently, Hidden Art developed as a culture-led initiative, facilitated by new cultural intermediaries, which aimed to develop both the cultural value of Hackney and the economic potential of individual and fragmented groups of designer-makers and artists. It has worked towards these aims by facilitating group identities, branding the cultural artefacts and through events and training.

In 1992 'the cultural workshop' was made up of hundreds of isolated individuals and clusters of professional and community arts organisations. Relatively few worked in managed workspaces and those that did increasingly seemed to share little more than the front door and the odd cup of tea. Increasingly, 'commuters' who lived outside the local vicinity used managed workspace. However, Hackney remained a location of choice for many designer-makers and artists, not simply because of low rents and the romantic notion of collective artistic lives lived in vernacular residential-industrial inner suburban landscapes. As residential tenure changed to owner occupation and the costs of workshop space increased, remaining in Hackney had more to do with its qualities as 'grey space' or non-judgmental space. Such space enabled interactions of home/work and family/personal relationships to be conducted without observation or comment. 'Grey space' offers personal freedoms, particularly to women. Social and professional networks were also important reasons for staying in Hackney. These often overlapped and bound individual producers to their audiences. These audiences were largely made up of friends, other makers and personal contacts with galleries and buyers from outside London. Thus these networks, which were highly individualised and quite private, pulled together local, national and intermittently international friendships and contacts. Hackney proved a central enough location to maintain these networks over space.

A critical role of the new cultural intermediaries was to facilitate strong group identities amongst isolated and individual designer-makers and visual artists. In this role they encouraged self-determination by, and self-help within, the groups. These group identities have given shape to the Hidden Art initiative and positive substance to the renaming of Hackney as the 'cultural workshop'. Several overlapping groups have emerged within Hidden Art. Two contrasting groups are *Hackney Contemporaries* and the *East London Design Show*. For both these groups, their identity has been shaped by the particular interpretations of key new cultural intermediaries.

Hackney Contemporaries is an elite group of mainly women designer-makers working in different media and at the cutting edge of contemporary European decorative art and design. Its formation derived directly from the intervention of a small number of new cultural intermediaries who recognised the cultural value of particular local designers' and artists' work. The intermediaries orchestrated meetings of a select group of makers and artists and proposed giving them a name which symbolised the style and contemporary form of their work. In acquiring a name, the group gained an identity. It was then easier for their collective work to be used to establish both a knowledge and reputation for Hackney based cultural products. The cultural reference points of both the new cultural intermediaries and the makers coincided. They both moved in the national networks of producers and cultural intermediaries who defined the symbolic meanings of the decorative arts, interior design and furniture. Both recognised that cultural value was produced through peer and audience review. However cultural legitimacy as a local designer-maker group was facilitated by the specific knowledge and recognition of staff at the Geffrye Museum.¹² They not only confirmed the cultural value of *Hackney Contemporaries* but also created opportunities and a venue to show work collectively. Since 1994 the interplay between makers and intermediaries has locked the identity of the group and their work firmly within elite European contemporary cultural tastes and values. Thus these tastes and values are asserted as delineators of cultural quality and aesthetic value. They are also used as discriminators of group membership.

Those makers and artists associated with the *East London Design Show* have a different identity. This is a very eclectic grouping of designer-makers who only come together to show and sell. Their group identity is loose and revolves around their self-help approach to marketing their own products. The group also draws on the sociability of self-managed design sale events. Being with friends and other makers in a convivial social setting fosters the group's network and its identity. The design sales originated as single events,

first in an empty shop space, then a disused town hall and latterly in a semi-derelict warehouse. They have now progressed to a shop in Hoxton Square (on a short term lease) and operate on a sale or return basis. *East London Design* is organised largely through one key maker who began by creating sales events for friends. The role of the local new cultural intermediaries, particularly those operating in design journalism and retail buying, in shaping this group's identity, was their endorsement of their sales events. They not only identified the unique and unusual cultural goods with potential symbolic value being sold but the journalists were also included in the socialising where comment and critique, economic value and aesthetic taste were discussed and defined. Both the essential makers and the intermediaries adopted additional roles as economic interpreters: identifying opportunities to present these cultural goods to the market. The group's identity became shaped by the infusing of a desire to increase sales of products, albeit in a sociable setting. Increasingly, membership became defined by what could be sold to a design informed, yet middle-brow, market rather than by abstract aesthetic taste and cultural quality defined in the elite echelons of the field of (contemporary) cultural production.

Likewise, the group identity of Hidden Art, as a whole, is increasingly driven by its marketing agenda. Individual makers and artists who have become associated with Hidden Art do so primarily to take advantage of the training, website and open studio events. However, as a consequence of taking part, many have developed a stronger shared sense of local creative production. The training workshops in particular focus attention on joint working to promote products and have fostered new contacts between makers. Even so, the core of Hidden Art is the annual open studio event which runs in November and December. Here new cultural intermediaries not only recognised the wealth of cultural goods with potential symbolic value but also gave these products exposure in a global city where metropolitan culture and consumption is increasingly based on the search for objects which are unique, unusual, and original. Hidden Art provides the impetus, organisational framework, sponsorship and overall publicity for this open studio event. It relies on makers and artists self-help to organise and set up their own display spaces.¹³ Over the last five years these activities have brought together approximately three hundred and fifty individual designer-makers and artists from Hackney and, since 1998, East London. Hidden Art has increasingly become a point of contact for individuals and a conduit for marketing information and advice. Its success has been in drawing together isolated and individual producers and presenting the locally created cultural goods for public and professional consumption.

While setting up the open studio event and through the early networking amongst designer-makers and artists, it became evident to particular intermediaries working in arts consultancy and management, that the business acumen of most producers was poor. Hidden Art was able to gain access to funding, principally under European Objective 2, to provide business training for designer makers and artists. Training workshops in business skills were offered including basic accounting and marketing, writing press releases, promotion and cash flow, business planning and loan applications. These have proved popular and extremely useful to those participants who wished to increase their volume of sales and raise their turnover. However, for other makers and artists the value of such programmes is questioned: they suggest that the pressure to become a business and seek to increase volume distracts artists from the process of critical creativity which underpinned their work. There was a perceived danger that the market *de-values* the cultural and creative legitimacy of their work.

In Hidden Art, the new cultural intermediaries' role as economic interpreters has increasingly placed the selling of cultural goods at the centre of the initiative. Principally Hidden Art has developed as a generic *brand name* for designer-makers and artists who work in Hackney and now in East London. The brand name has a logo which, at the moment, can be used by any participating individual or group. The mix of professional and self-help marketing of this brand name has now become the core rationale for the initiative. Consequently, the role of the new cultural intermediaries has increasingly emphasised economic interpretation. The object of branding is to increase the sales for individual makers and artists. In so doing, the branding also raises the profile of both Hackney and East London. So far the brand has gained both a London wide and an embryonic international reputation. It is promoted to the public and the trade through the open studio, exhibitions, and trade fair events - such as 100% Design - as well as through maps and the website. The development of the website was seen as an important marketing strategy. The Hidden Art website contains a database of all participating makers and artists with details of their products and where they can be bought.

Yet there are key issues arising within Hidden Art which derive from the hybrid role of the new cultural intermediaries as cultural mediators and economic interpreters. First they are defining and moulding local cultural production in terms of their own specific aesthetic reference points, tastes and values. This is evident in the particularistic identification of cultural goods which fit within the mores of contemporary European design. The results are divisive largely because the process of selection is itself 'hidden' and therefore non-negotiable. For example, the intermediaries drawn from

arts consultancy make the selection of exhibitors to represent Hidden Art at major national and international design trade fairs. Selection is based on their knowledge and recognition, their 'gift' of symbolic value, and thus selection is secured by personal invitation.

Furthermore, the economic interpretation of intermediaries has increasingly emphasised the saleability of cultural products. This creates an uncomfortable tension between assessing 'cultural value' and economic potential. The open access policy of Hidden Art has been revised with a fee of £25 now being introduced to weed out 'inappropriate' participants. For some this is taken as meaning those whose culture practices and products are not for immediate sale as (Christmas) gifts - for example, radical performance art and installations. Similarly, with the emphasis on the branding of Hidden Art, quality has become a pressing issue. For the brand name to have any symbolic and economic value, quality needs to be maintained. Maintaining quality implies selection and selection implies the imposition of criteria and processes of evaluation and monitoring. In an initiative which fostered openness and self-help, such debates around quality have produced understandable tensions. There are uncertainties about who decides the benchmarks for quality and where they are set.

In pressing the economic agenda and in introducing business training, this initiative has instigated a process of 'economic normalisation' within cultural production in Hackney and East London. The attitudes, behaviours and practices of business have been presented as convergent with those of cultural production. Incorporation into business practice has been part of a process of re-orientating the self-regulating, self-motivating practices familiar to designer-makers and artists, towards increased sales and market exposure. As such the fusion between enterprise and cultural production has been presented as unproblematic.

Working with what limited resources are available the initiative's approach has been both pragmatic and contingent, and has drawn together individuals to support and promote their own work and to exploit opportunities under the Hidden Art umbrella. In theory it should fit the narrative of the creative city: both through the production processes of those creating the cultural goods in a rich mix environment and within the organisational practices of the initiative itself.

In practice, however, the new cultural intermediaries have become pivotal in identifying suitable cultural practices, negotiating and maintaining the networked organisational structures of the initiative, and legitimating aesthetic taste and symbolic value. The promotion of particularistic cultural value feeds acquired cultural tastes. 'Economic normalisation' fosters the tastes

of a middle-brow audience. In encouraging both, Hidden Art has failed to capture the potential of the rich mix city milieu in which it operates. Where 'ethnic' cultural goods have been offered the cultural mores and market normalisation reduce the cultural value to a little ethnic variety and the consumption of the 'exotic': a pick-n-mix of cultural goods. Given the habitus of the intermediaries and the economic imperative of Hidden Art, this initiative is at present unable to draw fully on the diversity of cultural taste and values in East London.

Conclusion

The expectations of culture and creativity are high. Recognition of the economic potential of diverse urban cultures has led to claims that the density and proximity of social interactions creates a comparative advantage in globalised economies (Amin and Graham 1997; Worpole and Greenhalgh 1998). In areas that have 'knowledgeable people' and a 'critical mass of cultural creativity' it is suggested that different cultural influences are drawn together to satisfy the desire for urbanity.

By drawing on interpretations and experiences of a local initiative, set in one of the most culturally diverse areas of Britain, some questions have been raised here about how culture and creativity are mobilised for the economy. This article has suggested that the role, cultural training and economic aspirations of intermediaries shape the recognition and legitimisation of cultural practices. Through their knowledge the intermediaries assert cultural value and potential economic value of events, artefacts and experiences. By locking culture and creativity into economic regeneration, the values and practices of the market have become increasingly important in defining how cultural practices are undertaken and how they become visible at the local level. Such 'economic normalisation' thus begins to dictate which cultural practices and artefacts are included in the regeneration of the city. The role of new cultural intermediaries defines the boundaries to cultural diversity, what does and does not get included in the consumption of a multicultural city experience.

So, the practical role of intermediaries who mix cultural and economic agendas at a local level, can undermine the public expression of a 'critical culture' in which challenges to economic normalisation can be seen and heard. It also appears that the 'richness' on which creativity depends can be reduced to fulfilling the middle-brow tastes for an easy mix of cultural objects and

experiences: contemporary European decorative culture seasoned with a little exoticism.

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NOTES

1. These include analysts working for Demos, Comedia and the Urban Task Force.
2. This research into cultural production in Hackney has been funded by the ESRC's Cities: Competitiveness and Cohesion programme. As such it is part of a particular project being undertaken by a group of researchers at the University of North London (Beyond Fragmentation and Exclusion: Realizing Innovative and Cohesive Economies in Inner North East London Ref: L130251025). This on-going project aims to identify and analyse the 'hidden assets' of London's inner NE suburbs and is developing case studies of minority ethnic business, the black social economy and cultural production. The case study of cultural production in Hackney is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with actors throughout the chain of production and distribution of locally created cultural artefacts. To date these include interviews with producers; promoters, exhibitors and agents; arts consultants; regeneration agents; and retailers and suppliers of cultural products. For the purposes of this article, interviews with six key 'new cultural intermediaries' (working in arts management and promotion, consultancy and regeneration) and a sample of 24 of the interviewed producers (designer-makers, visual artists and performance artists) who have participated in the Hidden Art initiative have been specifically drawn upon.
3. Much of the criticism suggests that these strategies have been based on cultural elitism, prioritising either high art or minority interests which require an enthusiast's knowledge to participate. In addition, urban redevelopment policies which encourage niche retailing, hotels and visitor or 24 hour economies are vulnerable to competitive pressures and swings in tourist fashions. Consumers can and do go elsewhere, producing boom/bust cycles of investment. Furthermore there is a tendency to replicate the goods and services available at different consumption sites. Regenerated sites then become filled with outlets for the same standardised 'global' products (films, clothing, food, music) or similar cultural artefacts aimed at domestic decoration. As a consequence there is a sense of 'sameness'.
4. However, some cautionary warnings have to be attached to this vision. Others have noted that there is a mismatch in polarising urban areas between neighbourhoods and social groups who are included in the new 'creative' regimes of work and 'multicultural' civic life and those for whom unemployment is rife and social exclusion predominates (Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1995). Likewise there is an increasing discrepancy between skill shortage for the knowledge based new creative sectors of the economy and the large numbers of young people emerging from the school system with poor or no qualifications, low aspirations and low esteem (Social Exclusion Unit 1998). Furthermore, Amin and Graham (1997) have pointed out the limitations of having 'islands' of creative enterprise in an urban economy. They note that there is a danger that these 'creative milieux' will remain isolated and cut off

from their own city economies.

5. 'Habitus' (Bourdieu 1984) specifically means the cultural context within which an individual is socialised. This context generates and organises the cultural practices and representations without necessarily implying conscious mastery by the individual.

6. However as Zukin also points out, the real losers were the small scale, largely immigrant owned manufacturers and retailers who were eased out of the central city location by two processes: first, the zoning of the area as an artists quarter; and second, the artists', and their fellow travellers' celebration of a nineteenth century industrial architectural and interior vernacular which resisted the incremental modernisations required to maintain viable manufacturing activities (Zukin 1988).

7. So a distance was being forged between cultural capital and economic capital: the cultural intermediaries sidestepped the new cleaned up landscape of downtown SoHo (and its new owners/users). Bourdieu (1993) suggests that cultural capital has to distinguish itself from economic capital, despite their tight integration, in order to maintain independent authority. In O'Conner's example a similar process of distinguishing cultural knowledge and legitimation from economic value took place as club and music enthusiasts sought out new venues and experiences.

8. These local agencies included the local authority, regeneration agencies and not for profit companies.

9. The following interpretations of the emergence of the 'cultural workshop' is based on a reading of the relevant consultancy report (ppArtnerships and Urban Cultures Ltd 1992) and on material from interviews with three key intermediaries involved in facilitating and developing this vision.

10. The following section synthesises material from interviews with six intermediaries (including those involved in devising and promoting the 'cultural workshop' vision) who were integrally involved in developing this initiative. The interpretation also relies on a sample of 24 interviews with designer-makers, visual and performance artists who have participated in Hidden Art as members of Hackney Contemporaries, East London Design Show, as individuals or as members of design or performance art groups.

11. The breakdown is approximately 70 per cent/30 per cent designer-makers to visual artists. This ratio has increasingly favoured designer-makers.

12. The Geffrye Museum is a specialist museum of English domestic interiors.

13. This has created some difficulties for visual artists who are more used to having 'hanging services' from galleries or exhibitors. Similarly for new participants there has been a steep learning curve through which these skills have had to be acquired.